

The Self, Society and Social Sin
Bernard Connor (1938–1999)

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Bernard Connor served as a Dominican priest and as an eminent scholar on social ethics in South Africa. He was born, however, in Sussex, England, in 1938. He came to South Africa as a Dominican student in 1964 and was later ordained priest in 1966. He died in South Africa on 15 August 1999. As a theologian, he held degrees in moral theology from universities in Edinburgh, California and Natal. As depicted in Albert Nolan's tribute to Bernard Connor (see the article on Nolan in this book), in theological circles in South Africa, he was respected as 'one of the best Catholic theologians in South Africa'.¹

His theological works centred on social morality and his ideas on social sin exerted an immense influence on the social thought of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, both during and after the apartheid regime. Connor managed to exert such an influence by means of his active membership in several consultative bodies for the Catholic bishops, including the Theological Advisory Commission, the Justice and Peace Commission and the Catholic Institute for Education. His influence on the social thought of the Catholic church in South Africa was also mediated through the different positions in which he served: as a lecturer in Catholic seminaries in South Africa (1992–1995), a chaplain to the university students in Stellenbosch and Pietermaritzburg, an editor of a Catholic journal, *Grace and Truth* (1980–1992), an editor of a Catholic newspaper, *Southern Cross* (1992–1995), and as a vicar general for the Dominicans in the Southern African vicariate (1995–1999).

Connor's ethical investigations embraced social sin as the core subject matter. In his works, he enumerated several instances of dehumanising social conditions that qualify as social sins: sexism, racism, militarism, endemic poverty, political oppression, debt crisis and consumerism.² While not dwelling exclusively on a particular instance of social sin, Connor sought to provide a hermeneutical basis for understanding the interface between the self and society as located and mediated through social sin. What is the place the of self and society, as well as the link between the two,